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ABSTRACT

A practicum was developed to determine whether the motivation of a private school's ninth grade English class (18 students) could be increased by gearing the course toward a specified, authentic public audience and whether an increase in motivation would positively affect the quality of and attitude toward writing assignments and the use of critical analysis. A program was developed which incorporated audience-based strategies into the current writing curriculum. After completing a pre-project attitude questionnaire, students completed four writing assignments and responded to an attitude questionnaire upon the completion of each assignment. The students also completed a post-project attitude questionnaire which was used to determine any improvement in students' attitude toward the importance and relevance of writing well. The writing assignments included an editorial project, a short story unit, composing business letters, and writing anecdotes. Results of the program showed a positive correlation between audience specification and motivation. Knowing their audience helped motivate students to write more effectively and to analyze and revise their writing more frequently. (Appendixes include a pre- and post-project attitude questionnaire, attitude questionnaires for each of the four projects, and a teacher evaluation checklist. Thirteen references are attached.) (Author/MG)

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USING AUDIENCE AWARENESS TO STIMULATE INTEREST IN WRITING EFFECTIVELY

by

Michael C. Petko

A Practicum Report

submitted to the Faculty of the Center for the Advancement of Education, Nova University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science.

The abstract of this report may be placed in a National Database System for reference.

January/1991

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Abstract

Using Audience Awareness to Stimulate Interest in Writing Effectively.
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The Center for the Advancement of Education.
Descriptors: Audience Awareness/ Motivation/ Audience Analysis/ Peer Evaluation/ Effective Writing

This practicum was developed to determine whether the motivation of a private school's ninth grade English class could be increased by using a specified, authentic audience and to determine whether an increase in motivation would positively affect the quality of and attitude toward writing assignments and the use of critical analysis. The author developed a program which incorporated audience-based strategies into the current writing curriculum.

Results of the program showed a positive correlation between audience specification and motivation. Knowing their audience helped motivate students to write more effectively and be willing to analyze and revise their writing more frequently. Appendices include a pre- and post-project attitude questionnaire, attitude questionnaires for each of four projects, and a teacher evaluation checklist.

Authorship Statement

I hereby testify that this paper and the program it describes are entirely my own work. When it has been necessary to draw from the work of others, published or unpublished, I have acknowledged such work in accordance with accepted scholarly practice. I give this testimony freely, out of respect for the scholarship of others in the field and in hope that my work presented here will earn similar respect.

Signed: _____

Michael C. Petko

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CHAPTER I

Purpose

The program presented in this paper was implemented in a private Christian school in an unincorporated area in central Florida. The school has an enrollment of 450 students in grades K-4 through 12: 93 percent White, 5 percent Puerto Rican, 2 percent Black. The community in which the school is located is in an upper middle socio-economic class. The area was developed primarily as a retirement community, but because of the economic growth of the area, the community has grown in population rapidly, drawing families to the area. A majority of the students reside in single family dwellings ranging from $60,000 to $180,000.

The newly-established school has struggled to achieve consistency in faculty and academic curriculum, which have undergone major changes each year since the school's inception. The school places a high priority on extracurricular activities, to the point of putting academic subjects on hold when they

interfere with activities such as games, ski trips, fund raisers, and drama productions.

The students have been conditioned to expect to be entertained and to see academics as less important than their extracurricular activities. When they were preparing for a drama/music production, motivation for excellence was high; meetings and practices were attended with enthusiasm even when they interfered with personal time and other school obligations. The students were highly motivated to perform well because they perceived that the event had to be entertaining to the audience.

The role of the author was that of instructor of history and English in the high school. During the implementation of the program, the author acted as instructor of the ninth grade English class, presenting definitions and models of each writing assignment and providing feedback to the students as needed as they were completing the assignments. The author evaluated the assignments and determined the improvement of the students' use of language as a result of the program.

This program was implemented in a heterogeneously

grouped ninth grade English class of 18 students, ten girls and eight boys. The class follows an on-level curriculum. The objective of the school's writing curriculum was to teach the students to communicate effectively using various writing forms such as descriptive, personal narrative and biographical sketch, with a heavy emphasis on the need for revision and editing.

Of the 18 students, two consistently turn in A quality work; they were motivated to perform well by a rare (in adolescents) internal drive to learn and improve themselves. The remainder were generally satisfied with C's and D's. They did not perceive writing well to be beneficial to their academic or personal goals, mostly directed toward high performance in extracurricular activities. Of the 18, only two were not involved in the school's activity program, and they were very difficult to motivate for any purpose.

Within most English teachers there is a yearning and a sense of duty to instill within the students an appetite to write effectively. Yet, the students often misconceive the teacher's intentions, believing

the teacher is trying to make them into Steinbecks or Hemingways, and the students are disinterested in complying. The teacher is then faced with a major dilemma, a lack of motivation. This lack of motivation is often expressed by the students in a "variety" of mannerisms and expressions: arms folded across the chest, body slumped in the chair, and the immortal expression, "This is stupid," echoing from the lips of the astute children. Invariably, the teacher must answer once again the question, "Why do I need to learn this stuff? I already know how to write."

Often the teacher is caught responding with the old cliche, "This will help you in life," or "It will help prepare you for college." These responses are often perceived by the students as autocratic, and therefore, are not very persuasive. The obvious question of the relevance of writing can be the hardest one to answer to the satisfaction of the students. The job of the teacher is to direct the students toward a discovery of their own ideas, wants, and dreams, and to reflect these attitudes in writing. Once discovery has become the focus, the

next step is to motivate the students to make the discoveries for themselves. The current project dealt with motivating a ninth grade English class to write effectively.

The author discovered that there was a definite lack of motivation on the part of the students to learn to write effectively. The feeling was that there is no reason beyond the classroom to write. This attitude is of great concern to any teacher of English who knows that the ability to write well is respected and will be an asset to the students in life beyond their school days. The attitude of the students should be to desire to excel at writing.

The author uncovered this lack of motivation through observation of students' writing assignments, discussion with students who expressed this lack of concern for writing, and observation of poor test results and low grades on writing assignments by a majority of the students in the class. To further substantiate a lack of interest by the students, the author handed out an attitude questionnaire (Appendix A:46) to assess the students' level of interest in writing. The 10 questions were completed

anonymously by the students with a response from one to three, a three indicating the highest level of interest. Nine of the 18 students scored below the 70th percentile. Seven students were in the 70th percentile, and two students were in the lower 80th percentile. The results of this questionnaire showed a definite lack of interest in writing well by a majority of the students.

In this ninth grade class, 50 percent of the students did not see a real need for writing well beyond school. It was the goal of the author to see fewer than 15 percent who did not see a need to write well. The problem that could be immediately identified was a discrepancy of 35 percent of the students who did not see a need to write effectively but should.

Furthermore, the current program used by the school did not include any techniques or programs for developing interest in writing. The author needed to design a program to complement the current ninth grade English curriculum. The objectives were designed to stimulate within the students a desire to learn to write well through audience awareness.

The implementation of a sixteen-week writing program geared toward a public audience was hoped to produce four objectives. First, the students would be motivated to write effectively for the purpose of influencing an intended audience by seeing uses for writing beyond school activities. It was hoped that 75 percent of the students would score in the 70th percentile or higher on the four project evaluation questionnaires (Appendices B-E:48-54). The concept was to show the students that writing is done by a specific person, for a specific purpose, and for a specific person or persons (Cowan, 1980). It was the presumption of the author that if the students were conscious of an authentic audience who would read and respond to the writing as a piece of communication and not as an exercise to be evaluated, they would be motivated to write effectively in order to persuade, entertain or inform their audiences.

Second, it was the hope of the author that the development of public audience awareness would result in improved fluency, clarity and mechanics in student writing. The objective was that 75 percent of the students would score in the 75th percentile or higher

on the teacher's evaluation for each of the four projects (Appendix F:56). The grading policy for this program was such that all students could receive A's if they were willing to edit their writing to eliminate grammatical and mechanical errors and clearly express their ideas appropriately for their intended audiences.

Third, it was planned that the implementation of this program would positively improve the scores on the attitude questionnaire (Appendix A:46). The objective was to have 85 percent of the students score in the 70th percentile or higher on the attitude questionnaire at the end of the program.

The final and most important objective was that the students analyze their audiences and purposes and gear their writing accordingly, using appropriate style, techniques and vocabulary. It was hoped that the students would become able to apply audience awareness to future writing; if not, the program would be just another academic exercise.
The author hoped that at least 75 percent of the students would score 20 points (maximum possible) on the analysis portion of the teacher's evaluation form

(Appendix F:56) on each of the four projects.

CHAPTER II

Research and Solution Strategy

The current research and reports in the area of audience awareness deal with the positive effect that audience awareness has on students' writing. The point that is emphasized is that an awareness of who is being written to causes the students to be more concerned with style and correctness. An overview of the literature reveals that audience awareness effects students' drafting and revising of assignments. A more intensive view also reveals that it is because of the students' increased motivation and interest in the assignment that they are conscious of style and correctness. This increased motivation seems to be developed by audience awareness. Instead of the audience being a direct cause of students' willingness to revise and correct, it would appear that the direct cause is the students' increased interest and motivation.

Within the literature, the authors depict two types of audience: private and public. The private

audience is the teacher, considered private because the teacher is an unrealistic and static audience. Regardless of the nature or purpose of the assignment (e.g. business letter, editorial or research paper), the teacher is the sole recipient. The teacher as audience does not provide the added stimulus needed for the students because the students see the teacher's comments as an end in themselves. The public audience consists of peers and any audience outside the classroom. Public audience appears to add a different dimension to the students' writing. The students see a new relationship and begin to view writing as a means to communication rather than a means to a grade.

Roen (1988) discusses the effect audience awareness has on students' drafting and revising. The results of the study indicated that attention to an audience can positively effect the overall quality of students' writing. The findings also indicated that the attention to audience was more beneficial for the revision stage of writing than the drafting. The authors concluded that teachers need to help the students learn when to think about the audience and

when to blank them out of the writing process.

Rogers (1983) feels that students' interest is improved when the emphasis of evaluation is changed from the teacher's comments to the students' comments about their own work. Focus is changed form a subjective view by the students to an objective view of their own work. One of the key points mentioned by Rogers is that through self-evaluation the students begin to become aware of what they are learning, and that awareness tends to build interest in the learning process. This reborn interest leads the students to take pride in what they are writing. Pride is a strong motivating factor in the students.

Many of the authors pointed to the use of peers to help motivate the students in writing. Tchudi (1989) feels that allowing the students to help correct their own works helps to raise students' interest and excitement toward the assignments because the students begin to see another audience for their work besides the teacher. Moffet, as cited by James (1981), mentions as early as 1968 that peer evaluation is a good motivation for high school students because it shows the students another

audience for their work besides the teacher. James feels that peer evaluation is considerably less threatening to the students, who react negatively to criticism by the teacher but may be willing to accept such criticism from a peer. The author mentions that when students begin to write for other students, they discover an audience whose opinions matter to them and whose standards are compatible with theirs.

Cowan (1980) describes peer evaluation as a type of corporate management style. The article deals with two types of managerial operations. The first type is autocratic and tends to put constraints on the employees and allows for no decision making opportunities for the employees. Cowan relates this management style to the teacher-as-critic approach found in most classrooms. The author feels that this approach stifles individuality and creativeness. It allows the individual to see only what the "boss" sees as right. The second style of management allows for the employee to have a voice in the running of the corporation. This approach is paralleled with the student-centered approach to teaching. In this approach the teacher allows the students to comment

on their own work and the work of their peers. Cowan feels that

> external control and the threat of punishment are not the only means for bringing about efforts toward organizational topics. People will exercise self-direction and self-control in the service of objectives to which they are committed (p. 121).

Many of the authors feel that the shifting of the emphasis from the teacher as audience to another audience has a positive effect on the students' interest and motivation to write well. A study by Britton, as cited by Kanton (1981), asserted that mature writing needs to retain the expressive elements of fluency and personal voice. Britton felt that expressive writing needed to be infused at all stages of writing. The Britton study also discovered that the majority of writing was written in the transactional mode and directed toward a teacher-as-examiner audience. The Britton study concluded that teachers were not exploiting the full spectrum of discourses available to the student nor the range of potential audiences. Strange (1988) concluded that teachers who rely extensively on assignments or strategies that exclusively focus on the teacher as audience only train students to write

safe compositions that they feel the teacher will accept. The compositions may be grammatically correct but fail to engage or interest the student in the writing process. They also fail to reflect the realities of the process of writing outside the classroom.

Jenkins (1980) feels that many problems in students' writing can be traced back to the lack of a specified audience. She feels that one way to save a declining assignment and breathe new life into it is to have the students write it for an audience besides the teacher or peers. She feels that limiting the writing to a particular audience only enhances creativity, because it helps the students to focus on one theme and not try to think up a million ways to write the assignment.

Redd-Boyd and Slater's study found that assigning an audience does little for improving the quality of the students' writing but it does improve the students' interest, motivation or effort, and the use of audience-based strategies. They do point out that other researchers do not feel that audience awareness is necessary for adaptation. These scholars feel

that knowledge of text conventions is sufficient for adaptation. However, other scholars state that the competent writers are inventing their audiences within the constraints derived from the writers' knowledge of actual readers. This is a higher skill than most high school students have obtained.

Redd-Boyd and Slater discovered conflicting views within the available research. Some research showed very little change in quality, while others showed slight improvement. One of the problems with the results of the findings was the lack of time applied to the research. Another problem developed from the imaginary use of another audience besides teacher.

Other research suggested that students perform poorly if the audience is unfamiliar to them. Hence, it is important to provide explicit cues about the audience but not necessarily provide direct contact. Further research provided by Redd-Boyd and Slater also suggested that adult or distant audiences produced syntactic maturity, more contextualization, and stronger refutation than an intimate audience.

Redd-Boyd and Slater's findings showed a positive effect of a specified audience on motivation. A

specified audience also helped students to direct their writing to the level of the reader and improve persuasiveness.

Glatthorn (1980) described a program which emphasized improving the writing of less-than-average students. Several points that he mentions related to the teacher's role in creating an environment suitable for the students to encourage them to write better. Among other things he emphasizes the need to make the assignments personal and important to young people. He states that students need an opportunity to share what they have written with someone other than the teacher and that "the less-motivated student needs to feel that there will be an audience for what is produced (p. 164)." Glatthorn recommends sharing papers in small groups, posting on bulletin boards, sending some to administrators and parents, or reading before an entire class. The mode of presentation is not as important as providing an audience as often as possible.

Moffet (1983) mentions that the students need to have some sort of communication goal in their writing. In his section on sharing written products,

Moffet expresses that an excellent way to share students' writing is through the publication of that writing, either in a school newspaper, posted on the board, or bound in a book. He feels that when writing takes on the form of communication for the students, they begin to have a reason for writing. When sharing experiences in writing makes students as satisfied as when they communicate orally, then the students will begin to compose and revise their writing to make it clearer. He mentions these types of writing projects because when students write, they read more, they become more involved in language, and they become more involved with words, which helps to accelerate progress in reading and writing.

Rafoth (1985) was interested in the effect that audience awareness has on proficient and non-proficient writers. His study was based on the performance of the students on a persuasive writing assignment. Rafoth was interested in discovering how proficient and non-proficient writers differed in their adaptation of their writing for a specific audience with content-rich and content-poor information. In both content-rich and content-poor

groups, the proficient writer did better. However, the study did show that both the proficient and non-proficient writer did better in the content-rich group than their peers in the content-poor group. This seems to reveal that where the audience is specified for the students, students tend to write better. The improved performance of the students may be because their motivation is increased. This increased motivation may be a result of relieved tension or worries because the students have an audience whom they understand and relate to. Rafoth would agree with Jenkins that the restricting of writing to a particular audience does not stifle creativity, but encourages it.

Cowan describes writing for an audience, using the term "situational-context" to describe the writing process when the purpose and the audience of the writing are determined. Cowan feels that writing, in order to help motivate the child, should have a specific purpose and should be geared toward a specific audience. When writing is done for a particular audience, the students are better able to focus on theme.

Tchudi agrees that writing should be for a specific audience. Tchudi sees that determination of audience can also be accomplished through various publishing alternatives of the students' writing.

> Once the teachers and students have determined the form of publication, commentary about writing becomes appropriate; and the teacher and student can begin raising questions about effectiveness, clarity, organization, style, and structure (Tchudi, p. 241).

The teacher aids in motivating the students by helping the students to concentrate the students' writing so that it will not confuse the audience, by making comments toward the goal of communication to the audience, and by not prematurely commenting on style and correctness.

Solution Strategy

Research seems to support that emphasis on audience awareness should be part of the writing process and can increase motivation. Other strategies could be used to increase motivation for writing effectively. Stephens and Cooper (1980) present the use of a token system as a positive influence in academic achievement. Tchudi also acknowledges, as well as Glatthorn, that using a

token system can help improve student motivation. Tokens can provide a concrete reward for the student and help the student set academic goals. However, there are some side effects to the token system that can be damaging. It can be time consuming, become a crutch for the teacher, encourage the student to work at tasks which assure the rewarding of the tokens, and may interfere with learning if the teacher has not sequenced student skills appropriately.

The author discussed the problem with other teachers to discover strategies they have attempted. The promise of good grades for good performance and the threat of punishment and/or bad grades for poor performance simply is not enough. The intangible symbol is meaningless or worthless to many students, especially if they lack the maturity to see the long-term benefits of scholastic achievement. Another idea mentioned was team competition. This is similar to the token economy in that students are performing to win a prize such as a party or field trip, but the reward is delayed and is awarded to a team instead of an individual. Some students respond very well to team competitions, but many are satisfied to

sit back and reap the reward for efforts of others on the team. There is no individual accountability.

Tchudi makes several suggestions for increasing motivation in students including: using group activities, changing activities frequently, interesting students in what they are asked to do, using a variety of materials, assigning projects that have a genuine payoff, and demonstrating that student work is important (by posting it in the classroom, for instance). Research cited previously by Glatthorn supports the idea of making work seem important by sharing it in small groups or posting it in the room. Moffet's research also supports the publication of student writing.

The solution chosen by the author to increase motivation eliminates the previously mentioned problems with token economies and team competitions, and encorporates many of the suggestions by Tchudi, but takes them an important step further. The program was designed to include group activities; change activities frequently; use a variety of resources; and have a genuine payoff, the response of an authentic audience. While it is true that peers

make a better alternative audience than none at all, it is the belief of the author that they are still an artificial audience, and the students' work is not perceived as a piece of communication; the author becomes a performer and the audience becomes the judge of the work.

If the students write to a real audience and get a response to their ideas, if they are able to influence the beliefs and actions of others through their writing, they will receive tremendous satisfaction from writing itself and not from any external source. It is believed that such satisfaction will produce long-term motivation to learn to write effectively. Research indicates that

> when children attribute the cause of their behavior to external influences such as rewards or parental and teacher demands, rather than their own efforts, then intrinsic motivation is likely to be diminished (Gottfried, p. 151).

As Cowan aptly states, children do not need to be motivated by external controls; they will be self-directed when working to accomplish objectives to which they are committed.

CHAPTER III

Method

Resources

The sixteen-week public audience program was implemented as part of the second semester curriculum for a ninth-grade English class. The mentor was an invaluable resource from the beginning of the project when the author was trying to discover an appropriate problem for the subject matter of the project. The mentor was ever present, suggesting materials, assisting in providing feedback to the students and evaluating student writing, and offering alternatives when things did not go as planned.

When completing the short story project, the teachers and students of the classes who served as audiences for the stories were essential. They warmly received the students into their rooms and made the student authors feel good about what they had accomplished.

The materials for the program had to be different for each of the four phases. Each writing assignment

began with several examples which served as models for the students to imitate. Therefore, newspaper editorials were brought in, several short stories from the students' literature text were read, a teacher-made letter to a congressman served as the third model, and several anecdotes were shared from the Reader's Digest. Additionally, Forbes magazine had an excellent article by Malcom Forbes on what makes an impressive business letter, and Congressman Craig James sent survey results on relevant issues for the students to consider as topics for their business letters.

The program would have been greatly enhanced by the use of a computer lab. Unfortunately, one was not available at the small, private school at which the program was implemented. Consequently, the assignments which had to be typed were completed in the school's typing room. This situation proved to be most inconvenient because the students had no typing skills and the job was cumbersome. Drafts that could have been completed in one class period on a word processor required four or more periods to complete. If the students were not yet finished,

they were required to complete the assignment on their own time to prevent any further delays in the schedule. Several said they did not have access to a typewriter, so some did not complete the assignments. This unfortunate situation reflected negatively on the results of the program.

Monitoring

The program was designed for systematic monitoring in that it was divided into four phases, each of which was followed by a student and teacher evaluation. Each of the four phases emphasized a different writing form and purpose: editorial essays, short stories, business letters, and anecdotes. As an introduction to each phase, the students read and discussed examples of the writing form to discover its purpose and characteristics. The first week of the program, the students completed a preliminary attitude questionnaire (Appendix A:46) which substantiated the lack of motivation initially perceived, were made aware of the purpose and goals of the program, and were taught key terms such as audience awareness and audience-based strategies (content, vocabulary, purpose, readability, and

correctness).

Following the introduction, the students got into the heart of the program, completing four writing assignments, and responding to an attitude questionnaire upon completion of each (Appendices B-E:48-54). The projects all took more class time than anticipated by the author, so the original time table was constantly being changed. Upon completion of the four phases, the students completed a post-project attitude questionnaire (Appendix A:46) which was used to determine any improvement in students' attitude toward the importance and relevance of writing well. At no point in the program were the students admonished to improve their attitudes. The author hoped that the students would be encouraged to respond honestly on the questionnaires. The author's intent was to clearly describe for the students the writing forms' characteristics and purposes and the intended audiences.

Week 1: Introduction to Audience Awareness

The first week the author taught the students what it means to write for an audience. The author

gave the students some techniques for keeping audience in mind during writing. Also, the students were given three descriptive writing exercises to help the students practice writing for an audience.

The first assignment was a sensory writing assignment. The idea was taken from an article by Moffet (1983). The students were divided into four groups. Each group had a paper bag containing four objects, no two bags alike. Each student was allowed two minutes to reach into the bag and feel the four objects. Then the students described in writing what they felt. When the students were finished, the author read the papers and asked if anyone could identify the objects. Finally the other descriptions of the same objects were read for a comparison to the first one read.

The second assignment involved the students' sitting in different positions in the room. From these positions, the students were given 10 minutes to take notes on the dimensions of the room, the articles in the room, and their relative positions. They were asked to describe the color, shape, distance and position of the articles in reference to

where a particular student was sitting. Students were given 15 minutes to compare notes with another student and write a short description of the room synthesizing the two perspectives.

The third assignment took two days. The students were divided into groups of two. One student was blind folded and taken on a 15-minute tour of the school building by the other student. Each tour guide was assigned a different tour designed by the author. Then the students switched roles. The students were allowed to touch as many objects as possible, but were not allowed to speak. The second day the students wrote their perspectives of the tour. These essays were read for the class to compare the two perspectives.

Weeks 2 and 3: Editorials

The next two weeks were spent on phase one, the editorial project. The author brought in several examples of editorials, letters to the editor, and editorial cartoons for the students to read. The students learned the purpose of an editorial, how they differ from news, and the importance of giving support for opinions expressed in order to be

persuasive with the audience.

The author led the class in a brainstorming session and recorded topics of interest and relevance to the students on the board as they thought of them. Not surprisingly, the topics centered around things they did not like about the school.

The students worked several days on the editorials, composing four or five drafts or more in an attempt to get it perfect for display. Upon completion of the editorials, they were displayed on a bulletin board marked "Student Editorials" to be read by teachers and peers who used the room. The papers got the attention of many students who often responded enthusiastically, "I agree with this one!" and the like.

Weeks 4 through 10: Short Story Unit

For the next seven weeks, the students worked on writing a short story to be read to an elementary class of their choosing. The first four weeks, Monday through Thursday, the students read examples of short stories from their texts which emphasized a different short story element each week: conflict, characterization, resolution, and theme. On Friday

of each week the students worked with their groups to discuss the element taught that week as it related to the story they were writing as a group. That is, on Friday of the first week, the students brain stormed in small groups for possible conflicts they could use in their story, etc. The actual story was not yet being written, but the students were taking notes on the ideas they came up with.

For the next two weeks, class time was used to write the stories. The students took time out to share portions of their stories aloud to receive peer feedback on the effectiveness of their characterization and plots. The element of characterization was the most difficult for the students to grasp. The first drafts were void of any tension or emotion, but the students did not know why. It was necessary to give further teaching on character development.

The author made arrangements with the elementary teachers for the students to come in and read their stories to the classes the final week of the short story project. The elementary students were asked to indicate on a form whether or not they had enjoyed

the stories. The student authors received almost 100 percent favorable responses. They had gone into the classroom very nervous about reading but left feeling elated about having written something enjoyed by an audience.

Weeks 11 through 13: Writing to a Congressman

During this phase of the program, the students learned about business writing. They spent the first week learning about the legislative process in general. The students also learned about the different views of their state congressmen and brain stormed on what issues they wanted to address. They were shown the form a business letter is to take and read an article by Malcom Forbes on how to write a letter that will get noticed. He stressed the importance of a letter perfect piece.

In the second week the students decided the topic their letters would cover and began drafting. For most of the students it was necessary to reteach the organization of an effective letter as well as appropriate topics for specific leaders. They did not seem to understand that they could not complain about high tuition to their state legislator. They

also did not realize that the letter had to include a requested action on the part of the legislator. These problems are why the project took longer than expected to complete.

The students typed the letters the third week of the project, and the researcher mailed the letters. Perhaps the students should have been responsible for mailing them for a completely real experience. The payoff was not long in coming. Soon the students were bringing in the letters of response they had received in the mail.

Weeks 14 through 16: Anecdotes

This unit involved the students in writing for a literary readership. The desired audience was those who read Reader's Digest. The project again began with examples of the writing assignment from several of the humorous features in the Reader's Digest. Most of the students learned for the first time that the magazine solicits contributions.

The students were enthusiastic about the idea of earning up to $400. Deciding on an appropriate story was the most difficult for them. Some did not understand the difference between a joke and an

anecdote; other stories lacked a punch line. Many complained nothing funny had ever happened to them.

In the final week, the stories had to be typed and addressed to the appropriate editor for consideration for publication. This step required individualized direction. The students had to get their papers graded and approved for sending before they could mail them.

Evaluation

An overall evaluation of the method used in this program would have to be positive. The students responded with cooperation and enthusiasm at the new approach to writing assignments. It was good for them to become familiar with practical uses for writing such as editorials and letters to congressmen, as well as rewarding uses for writing such as entertaining an audience. The responses these students received to their writing were like none they had ever received before, and they enjoyed the difference.

One problem already mentioned was the time table. The students had had no previous experience with any of the writing forms, so there was much for

them to learn in order to complete the assignments successfully. The author was unaware, prior to implementing the program, how much of the material was brand new to the students, and therefore, did not set realistic schedules for completing the assignments. Originally, the program was planned to be implemented in 15 weeks and was to include a fifth writing assignment, a literary journal. The approach of the end of the semester and the need to prepare for semester finals prohibited extending the program.

The idea of using writing models for the students to imitate was good, but the students needed more assistance than the author had realized to identify the significant characteristics to be imitated. Although, for example, the students read several editorials, they could not conclude on their own that an editorial has to state a situation, comment on what is good or bad and why, and suggest an alternative. Individualized instruction was necessary to bring out these fine points, which is another reason the projects took longer than planned.

CHAPTER IV

Results

The measures of this practicum were designed for four purposes: 1) to see if audience specification affected motivation, 2) to see if audience specification affected quality of writing, 3) to see if the use of a real audience would produce a more positive attitude toward writing in general, and 4) to determine whether students adapted their papers to the level of their audience.

Motivation

The students' level of motivation was determined to be low by the teacher's observation and discussions with students about their writing assignments, as well as by the results of the preliminary attitude questionnaire (Appendix A:46) which indicated a poor attitude toward the benefit of writing effectively outside of school. The level of motivation to revise and edit for effective writing was measured at the conclusion of each phase of the implementation through the completion of an attitude

questionnaire (Appendices B-E:48-54).

The author's objective was for 75 percent of the students to score in the 70th percentile on each of the project attitude questionnaires. For the editorial project, 89 percent of the students scored at 70th percentile or higher, with one student failing to complete the assignment. The short story project resulted in 81 percent of the students scoring at the 70th percentile or higher. On the business letter project 72 percent of the students scored at the 70th percentile or higher (five students failed to complete the assignment), and 78 percent scored at the 70th percentile or higher on the anecdote project (three failed to complete the assignment).

Only one of the projects failed to meet the stated objective. The author discovered that the result of the business letter project was due to several factors: many of the students had no typing skills and were unfamiliar with the typewriters at the school, and did not have access to one at home. In frustration five students did not complete the assignment. This is where the author determined that

using computers would have simplified the process.

The results of the short story project have been adjusted, withdrawing two of the students' scores from the total. One student preferred to work alone on the project. The other student was forced to work alone because of absenteeism. Since one of the evaluation's questions dealt with working with a partner, these students' scores could not be used to show how the project affected motivation.

Quality

It was the author's objective that 75 percent of the students score at the 75th percentile or higher on the teacher's evaluation (Appendix F:56) for each of the writing assignments. On the editorial project 78 percent scored at the 75th percentile of higher Of the nine short stories written, 89 percent received scores at the 75th percentile or higher. On the business letter 72 percent scored at the 100th percentile. The anecdote project resulted in 83 percent scoring at the 100th percentile.

Attitude

The method for determining attitude improvement was based on the difference between the scores on the pre- and post-project attitude questionnaires (Appendix A:46). On the preliminary attitude questionnaire 50 percent of the students scored below the 70th percentile. The author determined that a low attitude score would be below the 70th percentile. The other scores showed that 39 percent were in the 70th percentile and 11 percent were in the 80th percentile.

The post-project attitude questionnaire showed a remarkable increase in the attitude of the majority of the class. Of the 18 students, 83 percent scored in the 70th percentile or higher. The largest increase was in the 80th percentile range. Thirty-nine percent of the students scored in the 80th percentile. On the preliminary attitude questionnaire, 78 percent indicated they thought writing would be at least somewhat helpful after school, and 33 percent indicated that being able to write well was very important to them; 95 percent and 56 percent respectively indicated the same on

the post-project questionnaire.

Critical Thinking

The method for determining the use of critical thinking skills was the students' scores on the analysis section of the teacher evaluation form (Appendix F:56), which indicated the adaptation of the writing assignments based on analysis of audience and purpose. The objective of the author was that 75 percent of the students would score 20 points (the maximum possible). The results showed that 81 percent of the students scored 20 points on their editorial papers. On the short story assignment, students were allowed to work together in small groups. Seven of the nine stories submitted (78 percent) received a score of 20. Of 13 business letters and 15 anecdotes, 100 percent received a score of 20.

Critical Thinking and Self-Reflection Checklist

During the course of the practicum, the author was aware of the need to encourage the students to think critically. To help maintain critical analysis the author used the critical

thinking and self-reflection checklist (Attachments, p. 58). Due to the nature of the assignments, the students were required to think of solutions and set personal objectives for solving the problems and for accomplishing the tasks which required creativity. The program also allowed group problem solving through brain storming and cooperative effort on assignments. Peer evaluation of the writing was included as part of the program and evaluators were required to offer suggestions for improvement.

CHAPTER V

Recommendations

This practicum has been designed to discover a correlational link between audience awareness and motivation. The author feels that the overall objective has been satisfactorily accomplished. The program showed that students are more willing to write well when they are writing for a real audience. The author is planning to integrate the program on a continuing basis where the program was implemented and instruct other teachers in the school regarding the logistics of the program and encourage its use on a school-wide basis.

Further, the author plans to present the results of the program at an annual conference held by the independent accrediting organization to which the school belongs. If there is a positive response to the program at the conference, the researcher will recommend that the program be published for other private schools in the district to use.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Pre- and Post-Project Attitude Questionnaire

Appendix A

Pre- and Post-Project Attitude Questionnaire

Directions: Put a number on the line in front of each of the following statements to indicate the degree to which you agree with each statement.

Not at all = 1
Somewhat = 2
Very much = 3

_____ 1. Writing is enjoyable.

_____ 2. Being able to write well is important to me.

_____ 3. I am a good writer.

_____ 4. Good writing requires much time and effort.

_____ 5. Good writing requires practice.

_____ 6. I often make major changes in the content of my first draft before turning in the writing assignment for a grade.

_____ 7. I usually read what I have written several times in order to find errors in spelling, grammar, and mechanics.

_____ 8. I usually read what I have written several times, looking for a better, more concise way of saying things.

_____ 9. The ability to write well will help me after I am finished with school.

Appendix B

Editorial Project Evaluation

Appendix B

Editorial Project Evaluation

Directions: On the line in front of each statement, indicate the degree to which you agree with each statement. Use the following scale to mark your answers.

1 = Not at all
2 = Somewhat
3 = Very much

_____ 1. I enjoyed an opportunity to let my opinion be heard.

_____ 2. I chose a topic for me editorial about which I felt strongly.

_____ 3. I chose a topic that I thought would be of interest to my audience.

_____ 4. Desiring to be persuasive with my audience, I worked hard to write with accuracy, organization, and clarity.

_____ 5. Knowing that my editorial would be read by my peers, I worked hard to make sure my writing was neat and free of mechanical errors, to the best of my ability.

_____ 6. The editorial project was more interesting and enjoyable to complete than most other writing assignments I have completed because it was written for a real audience, not just the teacher.

Appendix C

Short Story Project Evaluation

Appendix C

Short Story Project Evaluation

Directions: On the line in front of each statement, indicte the degree to which you agree with each statement. Use the following scale to mark your answers.

1 = Not at all
2 = Somewhat
3 = Very much

_____ 1. I enjoyed an opportunity to be creative in writing a short story on a subject of my choice.

_____ 2. I chose a plot that I thought would be of interest to the audience I selected.

_____ 3. I enjoyed working with a partner of this project.

_____ 4. Desiring to be entertaining to my audience, I worked hard to include an interesting conflict and resolution and adequate characterization.

_____ 5. The short story project was more interesting and enjoyable to complete than most other writing assignments I have completed because it was written for a real audience, not just the teacher.

Appendix D

Business Letter Project Evaluation

Appendix D

Business Letter Evaluation

Directions: On the line in front of each statement, indicate the degree to which you agree with each statement. Use the following scale to mark your answers.

1 = Not at all
2 = Somewhat
3 = Very much

_____ 1. I enjoyed an opportunity to learn how to express my opinion to make a difference.

_____ 2. I chose a topic for my business lett about which I feel strongly.

_____ 3. I am glad to know that my congressmen are interested in hearing my opinion and that I can make a difference in the way this country goes by expressing my opinion.

_____ 4. Desiring to be taken seriously by my audience, I worked hard to make sure my writing was neat and free of mechanical errors.

_____ 5. Desiring to be persuasive with my audience, I did my best to express myself with accuracy, clarity, and organization.

_____ 6. The business letter project was mor interesting and enjoyable to complete than most other writing assignments I have completed because it was written for a real audience, not just the teacher.

Appendix E

Anecdote Project Evaluation

Appendix E

Anecdote Project Evaluation

Directions: On the line in front of each statement, indicate the degree to which you agree with each statement. Use the following scale to mark your answers.

1 = Not at all
2 = Somewhat
3 = Very much

_____ 1. I enjoyed an opportunity to share a funny story with my peers.

_____ 2. I liked the idea of sending my anecdote to Reader's Digest to be considered for publication for which I could earn up to $400.

_____ 3. Desiring to be entertaining but brief, I worked hard to include only interesting and relevant details.

_____ 4. Knowing that my anecdote would be read carefully by the editorial staff of Reader's Digest, I worked hard to make sure my writing was free of mechanical errors.

_____ 5. The anecdote project was more interesting and enjoyable to complete than most other writing assignments I have completed because it was written for a real audience, not just the teacher.

Appendix F

Writing Project Evaluation Form

Appendix F

Writing Project Evaluation Form

Clarity (20 points)

Are the ideas expressed clearly? _____

Fluency (10 points each)

Is the writing organized logically? _____

Do the paragraphs flow smoothly from one paragraph to another with appropriate transitional words? _____

Mechanics (10 points each)

Are there fewer than
-five spelling errors? _____

-five punctuation errors? _____

-five capitalization errors? _____

Revision (10 points each)

Are there at least three drafts of the writing to give evidence of revision? _____

Analysis (10 points each)

Does the writing reflect audience-based strategies? _____

Does the writing reflect an awareness of the intended purpose? _____

Attachments

Critical Thinking and Self-Reflection Checklist

The GEM Practicum Internship

John Barell - (Adapted)

Using a scale of 1 to 5, rate your work setting according to the following items:

5=Very Often 4=Often 3=Sometimes 2=Seldom 1=Rarely

CLASSROOM

1.	When students pose unusual or divergent questions, I ask, "What made you think of that?"	(5) 4 3 2 1
2.	Information in the text is challenged.	5 (4) 3 2 1
3.	When a decision has to be made between involving the class discussion of an intriguing student idea (topic related) or moving on to "cover" content, I choose the former.	(5) 4 3 2 1
4.	I encourage participants to seek alternative answers.	(5) 4 3 2 1
5.	The target group receives positive reinforcement for initiating questions.	(5) 4 3 2 1
6.	Problems are used as a means for the target group to generate their own questions (or problems), which we then seriously consider.	(5) 4 3 2 1
7.	Teaching and learning occur without teacher talk.	5 4 (3) 2 1
8.	Most questions posed during class can be answered with short or one-word answers.	5 4 3 (2) 1
9.	Students spontaneously engage in critiquing each other's thinking.	(5) 4 3 2 1
10.	Students are encouraged to relate subject matter to experiences in other subjects or to their personal lives.	(5) 4 3 2 1

11. I stress how to think, not what to think.	(5)	4	3	2	1
12. Students often set objectives for their own learning.	5	4	3	(2)	1
13. Students spend time working collaboratively to solve subject matter questions.	5	(4)	3	2	1
14. One focus in my implementation is trying to help others understand how and why people (mentioned in texts) created ideas, solutions, experiments, rules, principles, and so on.	5	(4)	3	2	1
15. Students actively listen to each other.	5	(4)	3	2	1
16. I facilitate collaborative instructional problem solving.	(5)	4	3	2	1